



arts•gram

A Daily
Publication of the
National Veterans
Creative Arts
Festival

for Monday, October 16, 2000

Odell Brown – “Angels do exist”

When Odell Elliott Brown, Jr., played “America” on piano in his first performance before a live audience in 20 years at the 1998 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Houston, he said, “I was surprised that I didn’t have a panic attack.” When he brought the crowd to their feet after his second live performance at last year’s Creative Arts Festival in Grand Junction, Colo., he said, “I was surprised that I got a standing ovation.” This week, Brown will honor the city of Washington with a third performance at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, and he will prove once again, in his words, “the moral to this story is ANGELS DO INDEED EXIST.” You can’t help but notice Odell Brown—a tall African-American man with a white beard and gray dreadlocks, and a thoughtful, intense face. And then, when you hear him play the piano, you just know he must be someone special.

When Brown, a 60-year-old Army veteran from Richfield, Minn., showed up in Houston after winning the Creative Arts Festival instrumental music competition, rumors were rampant that he had once won a Grammy Award. While he was certainly good enough on piano to be a Grammy winner, people wondered: “How did he wind up in a VA talent competition?”

Brown was born in Louisville, Ky., and learned to play piano from his mother, who was a full-time housewife and a part-time piano teacher. At 18, he went to Nashville to study harmony, theory and orchestration at Tennessee State A&M University. He was drafted into the Army in 1961, and served with the 179th Army Post Band at Fort Carson, Colo. In 1966, he formed a group with musicians he met at Tennessee State and they called themselves Odell Brown and the Organ-izers.

They recorded five albums with Chess Records, and in 1968 they won the prestigious Billboard Jazz Award for best new group. After the breakup of the group, Brown worked as an arranger, composer and digital keyboardist with such artists as Muddy Waters, Curtis Mayfield, Minnie Riperton, Johnny Nash and Marvin Gaye. In 1980, he co-wrote “Sexual Healing” and he co-arranged and performed with Gaye on his “Midnight Love” album. In 1982, the song won two Grammy Awards.

How did a musician at the top of his profession

come to compete in a VA creative arts program? Here is how Brown tells his story:

“My involvement with the festival starts with my illness,” Brown said. “I have suffered with depression for a long time. My condition worsened in the late 80s and early 90s. Even though I was successful and making a living with my music, I found myself homeless, lonely and too sick to care for myself.

“One day I was sitting in a park in downtown Los Angeles waiting for the L.A. Mission to start serving food when a group of Army personnel came through asking if there were any veterans present. We were rounded up and taken to “STAND DOWN.”

“STAND DOWN is a three-day ‘camp out’ that happens every year, designed to help vets get back on their feet. Doctors, therapists, and counselors were there to assist our needs. I was examined and sent to the Long Beach [Calif.] VA Hospital.

“After an operation to remove a tumor from the roof of my mouth, I was treated for depression, high blood pressure, congestive heart failure and panic disorder.

“An old friend from Minnesota heard about my ordeal and persuaded me to move to Richfield, Minn., which is only 15 minutes from the Minneapolis VA Hospital. I did!

“I met Pam Gusdal, a therapist at the hospital. She asked if I would play piano for her patients. Out of gratitude for all the help I had received from the VA Hospital, I did! I later met Katie Ryan who asked if I would participate in the festival. Uncertain of what was to come, I did!”

Brown reports that his health has improved tremendously, and he has completed building a state-of-the-art recording studio. And, he married his old friend from Minnesota.

“I still play piano for Pam’s patients, and Katie Ryan is still my best pal,” said Brown. “The moral to this story is, angels do indeed exist.”

Welcome to the Nation’s Capital

Welcome to the 2000 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, a week-long celebration of music, dance, drama and art. While you are sure to stay busy attending workshops or rehearsing for the star-studded gala celebration next Saturday, you’ll also want to take time out to see the capital city’s museums, memorials and monuments.

Many of you will have the opportunity to take a personalized tour of Arlington National Cemetery, where you can witness the world-famous changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknowns. On Wednesday, October 18, all participants will get the chance to visit and tour the White House, and on Thursday, October 19, you can tour Mt. Vernon, the estate of

our first president, George Washington.

“We have all been holding our breath waiting for the activities to start,” said Paula Gorman, Host Site Coordinator for the 2000 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. “Everyone is excited as can be to finally see for ourselves what you all have been working on so hard—your art, sculptures, woodworking, song, music, drama and dance.

“We know you will enjoy your stay, and we will certainly enjoy being your host,” she added. “Work hard, have fun, be safe and have a wonderful time—you deserve it!”



BREAKFAST

Assorted Chilled Fruit Juices
Muffins and Fruit Breads
Scrambled Eggs
Bacon and Sausage
Home Fried Potatoes
Assorted Cold Cereals

LUNCH

Mixed Green Salads
Fettuccini & Linguini
Cheese Tortellini
Marinara & Alfredo Sauce
Italian Sausage & Penne Pasta
Garlic Bread and Rolls

DINNER

Mixed Green Salad, Potato Salad and Cole Slaw
Beef Barbecue and Buns
Country Fried Chicken
Corn on the Cob
French Fries
Peach Cobbler with Whipped Cream
Rolls and Butter

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival Schedule for Monday, October 16

Performer's Schedule

Artist's Schedule

6am

7

Breakfast at hotel 7-8:30am

8

Team leaders meet with participants 8:30am

9-11:30am

Introductions and announcements for ALL stage performers and staff. Individual acts begin rehearsal with music/show directors. Costume fittings with performing arts assistants.

Lunch at hotel 11:30am

Noon

1-4:30pm

Individual acts continue rehearsals. Costume fittings continue.

4-5pm

T'ai chi Workshop at Ballrooms A & B

5:30-6:45pm

Dinner at hotel

7-9pm

Chorus Number Rehearsals (All show participants)

9-11pm

Karaoke in Ballrooms A and B

1pm

2

3

4

5

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11

7-8:30am Breakfast at hotel

8:30am Team leaders meet with participants

8:45am Depart for VAMC

9:30am Artists Interaction Session at VA Medical Center, Auditorium (4th floor)

11:45am Lunch at VA (at room GC-120)

12:45pm Depart for National Gallery of Art

1-4:30pm Tour of the National Gallery of Art

5:30-6:45pm
Dinner at hotel

7-9pm
HHV Workshops:
Fabric Art Workshop (Martin Room)
Poster Art (Ballroom A & B)

9-11pm
Karaoke in Ballrooms A and B

Announcements

Late Registration

Late Registration will be held this morning from 7:00 to 9:00 in the Ballroom Lobby of the hotel.

Parking

If you are parking at the hotel, please park on the lower levels of the garage. The upper levels are reserved for vans and buses.

Lost and Found

Lose (or find) something? Lost and Found is located in the Host Room.

Medical & Hospitality Suites

The Hospitality Suite is located on the 4th floor, Suite 442. The Medical Suite is located on the 2nd floor in Suite 242.

